



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

PLANNING REPORT

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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DATE: July 23, 2008

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: PROGRESS REPORT ON THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE (District: All)

SUMMARY:

Overview

This report provides a summary of the progress that has been made by the Department of Planning and Land Use on the General Plan Update since September 2007. Additionally, it presents major issues associated with the project that have been identified during the past several months and provides an opportunity for the public and Board of Supervisors to provide comments on the project as it progresses.

Recommendation(s)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

1. Receive this report.

Fiscal Impact

N/A

Business Impact Statement

N/A

Advisory Board Statement

The General Plan Update is served by two advisory committees: the Steering Committee and the Interest Group. Multiple meetings have been held with both these committees since September 2007. Meeting minutes are available on the Department of Planning and Land Use General Plan Update website:

<http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/committees.html>.

Involved Parties

The County of San Diego is the project proponent. The General Plan Update will apply to all lands that are under the land use jurisdiction of the County of San Diego.

Planning Commission Vote

N/A

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BACKGROUND:

A project assessment of the General Plan Update conducted in Summer 2007 estimated that completion of the General Plan Update and the associated environmental impact report (EIR) would require approximately three additional years. This estimate assumes that Community Plan updates and the majority of implementing regulations and policies would be completed on a separate schedule. The assessment also identified a need for a new strategy for both the management of the project and the completion of the project documents. This new strategy began in earnest in September 2007 with the appointment of a full-time dedicated project manager.

PROJECT PROGRESS:

Since September 2007, significant progress has been made on the General Plan Update as described below. The project remains on schedule with a project decision anticipated in Fall 2010.

Hiring a Planning and Environmental Consultant

The Department of Planning and Land Use (DPLU) has contracted with a planning and environmental consultant to assist with the completion of the General Plan Update and the associated Environmental Impact Report (EIR). A qualifications-based selection was used to select PBS&J, a well respected nationwide firm with substantial California general planning and EIR experience. Some of their current and past General Plan projects include the following counties and cities: Sutter, Riverside, Sacramento, Beverly Hills, Simi Valley, Brea, Newport Beach, Inglewood, Corona, and Pomona.

Stakeholder Engagement

Engagement of project stakeholders – the advisory groups, community planning/sponsor groups, and the public – is considered a necessity for the successful completion of the project. Since September 2007, eleven meetings with the Steering Committee and Interest Group have been held. Additionally, from January to April 2008, General Plan Update staff attended 26 Community and Sponsor Group meetings to provide first-hand update on the project and to reiterate the County’s commitment to the completion of project and to include stakeholders and the public in the process. The General Plan Update staff have also launched a monthly e-newsletter to provide ongoing updates on the project to interested individuals. In coordination with the e-newsletter, the project website is kept up-to-date with the latest project announcements, land use map alternatives, and other relevant documents and information.

Project Work Plan and Schedule

As per the project schedule, public review of the EIR is anticipated for late 2009 and hearings for approval of the project would be in Fall 2010. The project schedule has been presented to the advisory groups, community planning/sponsor groups, and the public. It is posted on the website and project progress will be tracked using the schedule to clearly demonstrate staff’s commitment to it.

General Plan Element Preparation

Preparation of the General Plan regional elements consists of completing initial drafts of the elements and then coordinating with internal and external specialists for their review and input.

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Once all elements have undergone technical review, a consolidated draft document will be assembled for review by the advisory groups. At this time, technical review of all elements is well underway and will be completed before the end of the year.

Land Use Map Alternatives

In September 2007, two land use maps were endorsed by the Board of Supervisors – a Referral Map and a Draft Land Use Map. Recognizing the importance of alternatives to an EIR and the requirements under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives, staff focused on developing a comprehensive plan for handling alternatives. The Referral Map will be the Proposed Project for the EIR. The Draft Land Use Map accommodates less development than the Referral Map, thus decreasing environmental impacts; therefore it will be analyzed as a project alternative. Additional alternatives have been developed for consideration in the EIR to provide for a range as required by law including a Hybrid Map and an Environmentally Superior Map. These alternatives are intended to support the environmental analysis and better inform the Board’s decision-making.

The Hybrid Map incorporates portions of both the Referral Map and the Draft Land Use Map. It includes the Housing Element sites, the road network land use changes, and the other refinements to the map that were incorporated into the Draft Land Use Map. It also incorporates Referral Map changes that meet the Board-endorsed project concepts and principles and reflect the policy direction of the draft Regional Elements. The Environmentally Superior Alternative reflects a more stringent application of the mapping concepts that were applied to create the other maps and is more aggressive in restricting growth in portions of the Semi-Rural and the Rural Lands Regional Categories. The Environmentally Superior Alternative may be modified if the EIR analysis identifies areas of significant impacts where changes in land use can reduce or alleviate the impact.

The two additional land use map alternatives are now complete, as are additional graphics and tables that help explain how these alternatives differ from the others. With the completion of these alternatives, modeling and analysis that will support the EIR has begun. A number of scenarios are being analyzed, including: the Existing Conditions, the No Project (Existing General Plan Build Out), the Proposed Project (Referral Map), the Draft Land Use Map, the Hybrid Map, the Environmentally Superior Map, and Cumulative Projects.

Environmental Impact Report Preparation

As described above, the technical analysis that is required for the EIR has begun. Progress is also being made on other parts of the EIR to ensure that the schedule is adhered to. To date, initial drafts of the Interim Report for all EIR sections have been completed. The Interim Report consists of existing conditions information and the overall format and approach for the remainder of the document. The Interim Report allows for coordination between staff and the consultant for early identification and resolution of issues associated with the preparation of an extensive and highly complex document.

Draft Project Objectives/Guiding Principles

Project objectives are required for the EIR and serve as the basis for developing and reviewing project alternatives. In anticipation of the EIR analysis, staff has developed draft project

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objectives for use in the EIR. Staff intends for these objectives to be included in the General Plan as guiding principles. The objectives are based on project concepts and mapping principles that have been presented to and endorsed by the Board. The draft Project Objectives/Guiding Principles are:

1. Support a reasonable share of projected regional population growth.
2. Reduce land consumption and promote sustainability by locating new development near existing infrastructure, services, and jobs.
3. Reinforce the vitality, local economy, and individual character of existing communities while balancing housing, employment, and recreational opportunities.
4. Promote environmental stewardship that protects the range of natural resources and habitats that uniquely define the County's character and ecological importance.
5. Ensure that development accounts for physical constraints and the natural hazards of the land.
6. Provide and support a multi-modal transportation network that enhances connectivity and supports community development patterns.
7. Maintain environmentally sustainable communities and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.
8. Preserve agriculture as an integral component of the region's economy, character, and open space network.
9. Minimize public costs of infrastructure and services and correlate their timing with new development.
10. Recognize community and stakeholder interests while striving for consensus.

PROJECT ISSUES

Several issues have been identified by staff that relate to project logistics and stakeholder perception. Staff believes that it is best to identify and communicate these issues early so that a unified understanding about the project and the strategy for completion can be achieved.

Land Use Designations

The proposed land use designations and maps associated with the General Plan Update remain a major area of controversy. To complicate the issue, most individuals and groups seem to be focused on particular areas and properties. For example, while a group may generally be supportive of one of the maps, there may be a handful of properties with designations that are not supported. This undercuts their support and often results in full opposition to a map. To aid the Board in the process of selecting the final land use map, staff has inventoried all mapping differences between the Referral, Hybrid, and Draft land use maps. Tables and maps are used to describe these differences and are available on the project website. Further, staff will be evaluating each of these differences for planning and environmental considerations and presenting the findings with the EIR. This analysis will be used to solicit public input and will also be used to inform the Board's decision making.

Following public review of the EIR, staff will develop a recommendation for the final land use map based on public input and the environmental analysis. The Planning Commission may also formulate their own recommendation. These recommendations and the ultimate land use map approved by the Board do not need to mirror one of the alternatives evaluated in the EIR. If

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desired, they may be a combination of the maps or some other deviation. However, the resulting components of the land use map must be adequately analyzed by the EIR.

Conservation Subdivision Program

The Conservation Subdivision Program is a component of the General Plan Update that has gained a substantial amount of interest over the past several years. In general, the program is intended to facilitate compact residential design (such as clustering) in order to set aside areas of open space. The open space is intended to preserve natural resources and/or agriculture. Considerable effort has been put forth to develop a program; however, the program drafted in 2006 lacked the support of numerous stakeholders. Additionally, staff had concerns over its complexity and implementation. Staff has prepared a simplified program, which was presented in concept to the advisory groups in late June 2008. Staff's approach to this revision includes the following concepts:

- Moving away from a density-incentive/disincentive approach to a resource driven one – Meaning that clustering is not applied because one is required to do it or because of an incentive like a density bonus; it is implemented because the resources on the property support it.
- Removing density reduction and density bonus allowances – The previous versions of the program relied on a complex system of density reductions for steep slopes, wetlands, floodways, and floodplains; and density bonuses for clustering as an incentive. Implementation of these concepts would complicate the process, increase costs, increase processing time, and result in greater disagreements between staff, consultants, and applicants.
- Leveraging existing programs and regulations – The existing Zoning Ordinance contains mechanisms that allow for compact residential design (Planned Residential Developments and Lot Area Averaging). By improving upon these mechanisms and providing additional regulations that guide and promote their use, the same goals can be achieved in an easier and more efficient manner.

Equity Mechanisms

On June 25, 2003 (2), the Board endorsed the concept of developing an equity mechanism (such as Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program and Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program) to help preserve a landowner's equity position in their property. The concept was investigated further by staff and the Interest Group in 2003 and 2004 and an update was provided to the Board in May 19, 2004 (1).

Efforts on developing an equity mechanism have focused on a purchase of agricultural conservation easements (PACE) program. This program is currently under development on a separate but parallel track to the General Plan Update. A PACE program, considered a Purchase of Development Rights program, is a voluntary farmland protection technique that compensates landowners for voluntarily limiting future development on their land. Landowners retain many property rights according to the provisions specified in the easement and the right to farm. An easement restricts certain land use rights—primarily development as nonagricultural land. PACE

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programs enable landowners to sell development rights on their land to a government agency or nongovernmental organization, such as a land trust, while retaining full ownership. The program may be coordinated with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farmland Protection Program which may be a source of additional funding and technical assistance.

Community Plans, Zoning, and Other Project Components

There are numerous other components of the General Plan Update project and its implementation such as community plans, zoning, board policies, ordinances, procedures, etc. Similar to the equity mechanism, there appear to be varying expectations and assumptions among stakeholders with regard to these components and the timing for their completion. The following is a brief summary of their status:

- **Community Plans** – Community plans are a critical component of the General Plan Update because they provide community specific information and policy direction. Additionally, they are adopted as part of the General Plan and therefore must comply with applicable State law and consistency requirements. Updates to the community plans are required and staff is working with the Steering Committee to develop a standard template and schedule for the updates. The community plan updates will need to occur on a separate but parallel track to the General Plan Update. It is probable that several communities will not update their community plans by the time that the General Plan Update is taken forward for approval. In the case of these communities, an interim solution will be necessary. Staff is working with the consultant and the Steering Committee to identify options for such a solution.
- **Zoning and other Components** – There are numerous other components to the General Plan Update that are important to its implementation. Limited work has begun on these components; however, a comprehensive list and work plan for their completion is under development. In order to assure that the General Plan Update remains on schedule, staff's focus will stay with the General Plan itself. However, staff is also committed to timely execution of these associated components of the General Plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL STATUS:

A Program Environmental Impact Report will be prepared for the General Plan Update and its various components. A Notice of Preparation (NOP) soliciting input on the scope of the EIR was issued first in 2002 and again recently from April 28, 2008 to May 28, 2008. A copy of the NOP and comments on the NOP are available on the project website:

http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/docs/gpupdate_nop.pdf.

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Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chandra Wallar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

CHANDRA L. WALLAR
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

Cc: All Community Planning/Sponsor Groups
San Diego County Planning Commissioners
Interested Parties (via email)

ATTACHMENT(S)
N/A

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AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET

CONCURRENCE(S)

COUNTY COUNSEL REVIEW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	
Written disclosure per County Charter		
§1000.1 required?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
GROUP/AGENCY FINANCE DIRECTOR	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
Requires Four Votes	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
GROUP/AGENCY INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DIRECTOR	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
COUNTY TECHNOLOGY OFFICE	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A

Other Concurrence(s): N/A

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT: Department of Planning and Land Use

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